

# **Laughter in the Second Language Classroom**

- A Comparison of Teacher Trainees and Experienced Teachers -

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## **教室における「笑い」の意味**

—教育実習生と経験者を比較して—

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The purpose of this study is to compare the occurrence of laughter in classes of Japanese as a second language taught by teacher trainees and experienced teachers in terms of classroom dynamics. The data for this study is taken from a database based on the transcription of video recordings of the two types teaching to the same class. One is the lessons of seven teacher trainees and the other is the lesson of an experienced teacher as a case study. The relationship between the three hypothetical laughter types and class management is investigated. Statistical analysis was applied to the data to contrast the classroom discourse. From the results we can see that Type-A Laughter accounts for most of the laughter in both classrooms, Type-B Laughter is used by the teacher in the experienced teacher's class, and Type C is used by the students in the teacher trainees' lessons.

These results of this investigation indicate the strong class management of the experienced teacher in comparison to the teacher trainees.

Laughter is a very common phenomenon in the daily social life of human beings. How many times do we laugh in one day? It is possible to have a day

without crying, but not a day without laughing. With laughter we can communicate in a variety of different ways, for instance making friends, easing tension, or covering up something.

Laughter is a human activity that occurs regardless of age, race, language and culture. For example, people from completely different cultures can laugh together even if they don't speak the same language. It is particularly useful in intercultural communication, since one can laugh without knowing the other party's language.

### **1. The purpose of this study**

The purpose of this study is to compare the occurrence and the function of laughter in classes of Japanese as a second language taught by teacher trainees (abbreviated T.T.) and an experienced teacher (abbreviated E.T.) in terms of classroom communication. How do members of the second language class use laughter as a communication device?

### **2. The data**

The data for this study is taken from a database based on the transcription of video recordings of the two types of teachers teaching the same advanced level Japanese as a second language class. One is the lessons of seven teacher trainees and the other is the lesson of an experienced teacher.

Therefore this is only a case study of the comparison of the teaching experience and laughter, but still we can see the interesting difference of using laughter as a communicative device.

The classroom discourse is different from natural daily conversation. It is a more constrained exchange system, that is, it is based on "initiation-reply". The

exchange is performed between one teacher and many students. The students get a turn to speak, but the right to make an utterance is constrained. The class exchange is similar to public performance in that the audience is often seen to communicate with the speaker via laughter. What is more, the students in this class are prohibited to use their mother tongue. As a consequence, they tend to use laughter instead of their mother tongue or Japanese.

We did not differentiate the phonological difference of the data since in this data most of the laughter is transcribed as <*warai*> (laughter). The phonological appearance of laughter, taking such forms as “*Ahaha*”, “*Fufu*” and the length are not described.

Statistical analysis was applied to contrast the classroom discourse in this paper. The purpose of this comparison was to investigate how the function of laughter is used in class management in terms of mutual teacher and student interrelationships.

### **3. Differentiation of the three types of laughter**

First of all, we roughly classified the laughter in the lessons into three types to see how each was being used.

For example, when laughter occurred with enjoyable idea, it is considered as Type A laughter: Enjoyable laughter. They are enjoying the exchange of laughter as in example below:

#### **Example 1**

(They are talking about a literature prize.) “★” indicates the beginning of an overlapped utterance. “→” indicates the beginning of an overlapping utterance and “←” indicates the end of an overlapping utterance.

E.T.: ですから、皆さんがずっと日本に住んで、住んだり、ずっと留学で長  
くいて小説書いてデビューして、★取っちゃうかもしれませんよね。

<笑い>

*Desukara, minasan ga zutto Nihon ni sunde, sundari, zutto ryuugaku de  
nagaku ite syoosetu kaite debyuu shite, ★tottyau ka mo siremasen yo ne  
<warai>*

So if you live in Japan for a long time, or study in Japan for a long time,  
and write a novel and make your debut, you might carry off the prize.  
<laughter>

S!: →<笑い>←

→<warai>←

→<laughter>←

E.T.: もう取ったら、あのパーティーやりますから、必ず私を呼んで★くだ  
さい。<笑い>

*Moo tottara, ano paatii yarimasu kara, kanarazu watasi o yonde ★  
kudasai. <warai>*

If you do get it I guess you'll be throwing a party, so be sure to invite me.  
<laughter>

S: →<笑い>←

→<warai>←

→<laughter>←

E.T.: いろいろね、おいしい料理も出てきますから。★<笑い>

*Iroiro ne, oisii ryoori mo dete kimasu kara. ★ <warai>*

...'cause all sorts of delicious dishes will be served. <laughter>

S: →<笑い>←

→<warai>←

→<laughter>←

The topic could be introduced without laughter, as in example 2:

### Example 2

(Explaining how to get a literature prize) (Ryuu is the one of the students' names.)

E.T.: ここに有名なリュウ先生という作家がいる。

*Koko ni yuumei na Ryuu sensei to iu sakka ga iru.*

For example, here is a famous novelist called Ryū?

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1 "Students" is abbreviated as "S"

S: →<笑い>←  
→<warai>←  
→<laughter>←

By using this laughter, people become intimate and strengthen their unity.

Type-B Laughter occurs when the speaker wants to ease tension caused by shame, intrusion and so on. When the speaker tells something (s)he considers to be a shameful or embarrassing matter or when the speaker intrudes herself into the matters of others, such as correcting student's mistake, in order to ease the tension occurred, she laughs.

For example, when the teacher is not able to remember a Chinese character, she laughs off her shame with Type-B laughter as follows.

### Example 3

(after writing Chinese character, she was not certain about it)

E.T.: ちょっとこの字、あとで確認してください。<笑い>  
*Tyotto kono zi ato de kakunin site kudasai.<warai>*  
Please check this Chinese character later. <laughter>

When the teacher corrects a student's mistake, she laughs with Type-B laughter as in the example 4 in order to soften the intrusion:

### Example 4

S: 読者の目から見ると、第一期の文学に対して、ダイコク。  
*Dokusya no me kara miru to dai-ikki no bungaku ni taisite, DAIKOKU...*  
From the view point of the reader, in comparison to the first period,  
DAIKOKU

E.T.: 大江文学。 <笑い>  
OOE *bungaku* <*warai*>  
OOE literature <laughter>

The teacher corrects the student's reading mistake from "DAIKOKU" to "OOE". She is not laughing at the student's mistake but softening the correction in order not to hurt the student's feeling.

Type-C Laughter happens when the person wants to cover up something. For example, when attention is drawn to student A, who is sleeping, she attempts to hide her awkwardness by using Type-C laughter.

**Example 5**

(to A who is sleeping)

E.T.: ねえ、Aさん、そうですね。  
*Nee A-san soo desyoo.*  
Isn't that right Ms. A?

Student A: <わらい>  
<*warai*>  
<laughter>

In the example 6, the students were puzzled because the question seemed too easy for them. Then one of the students answered. The recording quality of the tape is not good, but judging by the teacher's confirmation, we can assume that the student's answer was correct.

**Example 6** “#” indicates an utterance cannot be transcribed because of poor recording quality.

T.T.: B さん、これは何だかわかりますか？  
*B-san, kore wa nan da ka wakarimasu ka?* (showing the picture of a house)  
Ms.B, do you know what this is?

S: ###

T.T.: そうですね。これは家です。  
*Soo desu ne, kore wa ie desu.*  
That’s right. This is a house.

S(plural): <笑い>  
<warai>  
<laughter>

After confirmation of the answer, the students were perplexed, since it seemed too simple.

#### 4. Results of differentiation

Type-A Laughter accounts for most of the laughter in both classrooms, but Type-B laughter and Type-C laughter show a different distribution. See table 1 and 2:

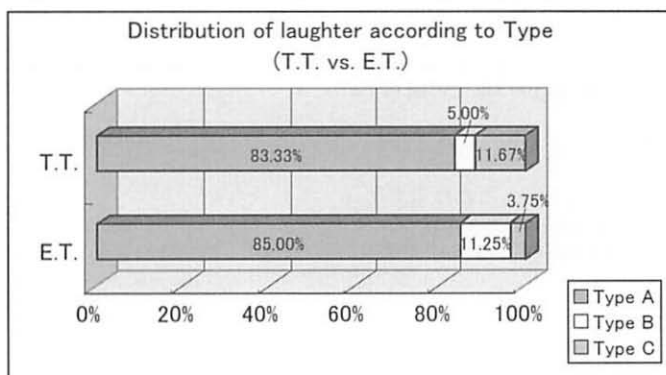
**Table 1: Distribution of laughter according to Type (T.T.s’ class)**

Type of laughter	Laughter	Ratio
Type A	50	83.33%
Type B	3	5.00%
Type C	7	11.67%
Total	60	100.00%

**Table 2: Distribution of laughter according to Type (E.T.’s class)**

Type of laughter	Total	Ratio
Type A	68	85.00%
Type B	9	11.25%
Type C	3	3.75%
Total	80	100.00%

**Graph 1: Distribution of laughter according to Type (T.T. vs. E.T.)**



In both cases, Type-A Laughter occurred most (T.T.: 83.33%, E.T.: 85.00%). However, Type-B Laughter occurred more in the E.T. lessons (11.25%) than in those of the T.T. (5.00%), and Type-C Laughter occurred more in the T.T.s' lessons (11.67%) than in those of the E.T. (2.50%). In other words Type-B Laughter was used more in the E.T.'s class and Type-C Laughter, was used more in T.T.s' class. This means that the participants of the E.T.'s class were easing tension by laughing, and those of the T.T.s' classes were laughing to cover up something.

The difference between the classes is more obvious when these results are analysed according to 'who was doing the laughing'. See Table 3 and 4:

**Table 3: Analysis of laughter type according to who is laughing (T.T.s' class)**

Type of laughter	T.T. s' laugh	ratio	Students' laugh	ratio	total	ratio
Type A	11	18.33%	39	65.00%	50	83.33%
Type B	2	3.33%	1	1.67%	3	5.00%
Type C	1	1.67%	6	*10.00%	7	11.67%
total	14	23.33%	46	76.67%	60	100.00%



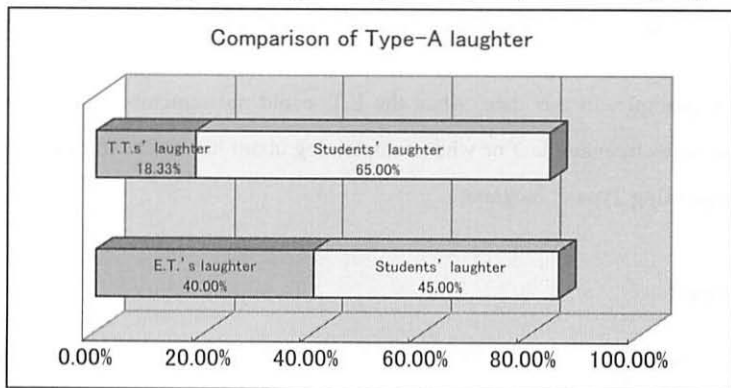
**Table 4: Analysis of laughter type according to who is laughing (E.T.'s class)**

Type of laughter	E.T.'s laugh	ratio	Students' laugh	ratio	total	ratio
Type A	32	40.00%	36	45.00%	68	85.00%
Type B	9	*11.25%	0	0.00%	9	11.25%
Type C	1	1.25%	2	2.50%	3	3.75%
total	42	52.50%	38	47.50%	80	100.00%

#### Comparison of Type A laughter

In the E.T.'s class, the teacher laughs as often as the students (40.00% vs. 45.00% in table 4). In contrast, the teachers in the T.T.s' classes laugh less than one third as much as the students (18.33% vs. 65.00% in table 3). See Graph 2

**Graph 2: Comparison of Type-A laughter according to who is laughing**



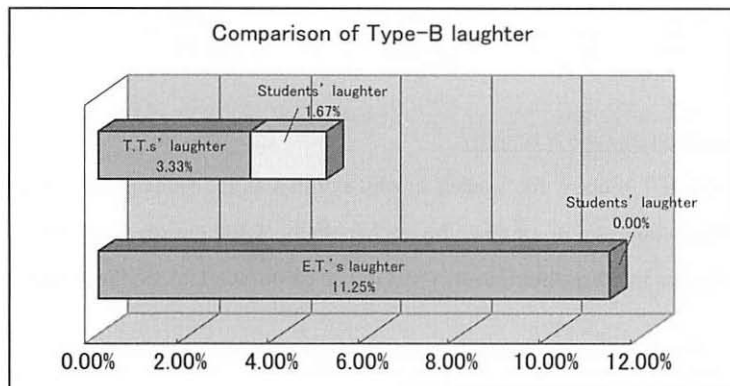
Laughter occurs very infrequently in the T.T.s' records compared to the E.T.'s, i.e. the T.T.s do not use Type A laughter: appealing laughter much in their lessons.

#### Comparison of Type B laughter

In the E.T.'s class Type-B Laughter is used only by the teacher (see the

asterisk in table 4). See Graph 3

Graph 3: Comparison of Type-B laughter according to who is laughing



For example, in this data, when the E.T. could not remember the Chinese character as in example 3 or when complaining about her age as in example 7, she was using Type-B laughter.

#### Example 7

E.T.: もう、ちょっと、わたしもこのまま頭がどんどん下がっていくから。  
 <笑い>  
*Moo tyotto watasi mo kono mama atama ga dondon sagatte iku kara.*  
 <laughter>  
 A little more...Me too, I am rapidly losing my intelligence like this.

In contrast, the T.T.s do not use Type-B laughter much. This does not mean that the T.T.s do not make mistakes. In fact, the T.T.s make mistakes often, for instance in the writing of Chinese characters, intonation etc. I have to correct them in every meeting after a lesson. Most of the time, however, they do not realize their mistakes while they are teaching, or until they are pointed out. In

their training diaries, they often write that they had been teaching without really knowing what they were doing.

The E.T. also uses Type-B laughter when she corrects students' reading mistakes as in example 4 and 8.

#### Example 8

(The student is reading a text book.)

S: 1作ごとにうまくなっていきますと、そうとう年齢です。  
Issaku goto ni umaku natte ikimasu to, SOOTOO nenrei desu.  
His writing techniques become better with each novel. Considerable age.

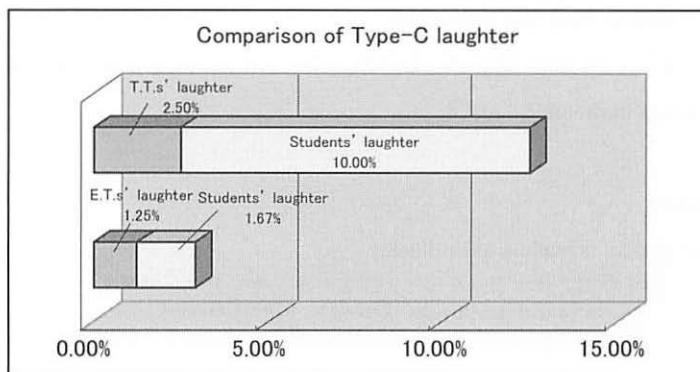
T.T.: ごめんなさい。これ「そういう」年齢 <笑い>  
*Gomen nasai, kore SOO IU nenrei. <laughter>*  
Sorry this is “SOO IU” that sort of (not “SOOTOO”).

The teacher makes an effort to ease the tension caused by the correction by using Type-B laughter.

#### Comparison of Type-C laughter

In the T.T.s' class, Type-C laughter is used mainly by the students (see the asterisk in table 11), and this was exemplified when the T.T. asked too simple a question such as showing the picture of a house and asking “what is this?” In contrast, Type-C Laughter only occurs twice in the E.T.'s lesson. We also saw Type-C laughter in the E.T.'s lesson, for example, when attention was drawn to a sleeping student, or when they were asked whether or not they were hard workers.

Graph 4: Comparison of Type-C laughter according to who is laughing



## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can see the strong class management of the E.T. The E.T. creates a strong feeling of unity in the class by inviting students to laugh with Type-A laughter. She also uses Type-B laughter to soften the intrusion. In the T.T.s' classes, the students try to be co-operative with the teacher by using Type-A laughter, but from time to time they use Type-C laughter, since they are perplexed.

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